



In Bounds

By JACK MACKENZIE, CGCS
North Oaks Golf Club

Indeed the past seven months have been challenging. What with the setback of dead turf when the snow melted followed by a marginal May recovery period and then a June of excessive rainfall, it is not surprising that recovery has taken a long time. With the delayed rejuvenation many have experienced unhappy golfers who demand perfection for their dollar.

Challenging? You bet, but it is disheartening to hear so many of my brethren wishing the summer away and pray for an early fall. I do not know about you folks, but my life is finite and to wish a series of unfortunate events over just shortens the potential for the good times I have ahead. To be honest, I would have to say that the summer of 2005 has been one of the most rewarding seasons I have ever had.

First off, I have been able to apply my craft, that of a turf manager. The diploma that hangs upon my office wall testifies to the fact that I sat through many classes and came away with passing grades. But it takes a difficult growing period to really make me evaluate the situation at hand, gather my talents and

produce the best conditions I possibly can within budgetary limitations and climatic conditions.

Nobody told me it would be easy. It hasn't been. Mother Nature pounded me hard and that really bruised my ego. My course still has evidence of winter injury and probably will until the fairways are aerified this fall. But my staff has done an excellent job in their recovery efforts and it shows. This despite a bad bout with Pythium attributed to a control product failure, several major irrigation issues and a never-ending golf event schedule. Personally my skills as a turf manager have shined.

Second, my son and I have taken our relationship to a new level; we have become very good friends. Upon the course I realize I have done all that I can possibly do and still maintain my sanity, and this allows me to concentrate my remaining energy upon my family. This summer I have been fortunate enough

to again work with my son. In his sixth season at North Oaks he has matured into a dedicated and hard working employee.

But it is not all work that has forced our camaraderie. Our commute allows us the opportunity to discuss relevant issues,

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from the possibility of UFO's to the war in Iraq to personal finances. And the drive home affords us time to formulate our evening plans, fishing, wake boarding or even just a movie. Of course he has other events going with his chums and chicks, but I am so very thankful for the moments we have shared this summer. How could I wish them away?

Third, the tests I have faced this golf season have brought me closer to my higher power. Many have heard the phrase, "If you are going to pray, don't worry and if you are going to worry, then don't pray." Reflecting on the last 200 days has given me a great appreciation for this wisdom.

Very often during the course of my crisis I have reminded myself to "just let go, it is only turf, nobody's life is at stake and grass grows in spite of what we do (not to mention it often dies in spite of what we do!)" So very much of life is out of my control that to spend effort upon peripheral crisis would only serve to harm me mentally and emotionally.

Good managers are at their best during a challenge, primarily because they can measure the options and appreciate their own abilities to change or accept the outcome of their choices. Letting go of circumstances beyond a person's control will only allow that individual to better manage the issues that can be controlled.

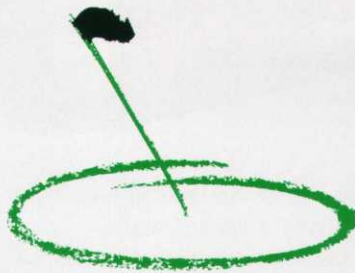
For many superintendents this is difficult to embrace. And perhaps that is why golf course managers often burn out by the age of fifty.

Finally, who could wish away the smell of freshly mowed grass, the coolness of dew under your feet, the morning voice of the Robin or the beauty of a rainbow? How about the measured gains made through teamwork? That has to count for something.

Here at North Oaks we have ended many days this season with the phrase, "We saved a lot of grass today." By focusing on the positive, my staff and I have kept it together and managed during a trying summer. By bolstering the pluses and minimizing the negatives we have survived, no we have excelled.

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